

Lotus River teen sets sail for Italy

LIAM MOSES

A LOTUS RIVER teenager is set to compete at the highest level of competitive sailing this year when he travels to Italy to take part in the RS Tera Junior World Championships in August.

Jean-Pierre Roberts (15) has been sailing since early 2010 and he qualified for the World Championships by finishing in the top five at all the events he competed in during the sailing season.

Roberts, who attends False Bay College in Fish Hoek, says that he could barely contain himself when he discovered that he had qualified to travel to Italy.

"I was sitting and they were calling out our names, saying where we came, after an event. (When they called my name) I was excited, I jumped out of my seat and I was just shouting.

"I love sailing. I love being on the water, I love racing and going out to events. When I'm on the water I feel excited. I just want to be in front of the fleet. I like the racing part of it."

Roberts started sailing when he joined his cousin as a crew member on a Sonnet class boat, and then joined the Zeekoevlei Sailing Academy, based at the Zeekoevlei dam in Grassy Park, and started sailing boats in the RS Tera class.

The Academy has been around for four years and aims to teach the sport of sailing to youngsters from schools in the southern suburbs.

Currently about 100 children from seven schools take part in the programme and visit the sailing centre at least one day a week to sail boats and receive coaching.

The students who show talent and interest in the sport attend a more advanced class on Saturdays and take part in local, regional and national competitions.

According to Ryan Pentolfe, a sailing instructor at the academy, the Zeekoevlei Yacht Club started the academy as a way to bring fresh blood into a sport that was dying a slow death in South Africa.

"The idea was to get the community sailing, because sailing is a sport that is on the decline due to other extreme sports," says Pentolfe.

"Sailing is a huge sport overseas, but not in South Africa. It used to be bigger. At a Sprague national championships you used to get 80 to 100 boats but now you struggle to get 20 boats. There is a big decline in the sport." The students at the Academy attend schools in areas such as Lotus River, Grassy Park and Fish Hoek, but come from areas all over the southern peninsula, including Mitchell's Plain, Ocean View, Plumstead and Simon's Town.

Pentolfe says that apart from being a fun pastime, sailing can also

be a career path and that the youngsters at the sailing academy could eventually branch out into maritime jobs such as boat building, sail making, chartering, racing or coaching. The 24-year-old, who grew up in Cafda, Retreat, but now lives in Wynberg, started sailing at the Zeekoevlei dam as part of a Rotary Club programme that is a predecessor to the academy and is an



SHIPS AHOY: Ryan Pentolfe (in red), an instructor at the Zeekoevlei Sailing Academy, helps his student Jean-Pierre Roberts to prepare his RS Tera boat. Roberts has qualified to take part in the RS Tera Junior World Championships. Photo: Liam Moses

excellent example of how a career can be made in the sport.

"I was at Grassy Park High and they asked me to come sail. Every Saturday for a about a year I was sailing and then I got more into it and started going to the racing scene and it just went on from there.

"Now I'm a sailing coach, qualified, with international accreditation. That's how far it took me. I did

some charters, it took me overseas, I did the Cape to Rio race, and all because of sailing."

Attending the academy is completely free, but Roberts will have to pay his own way if he is to take part in the Junior Championships.

The combined costs of travelling, accommodation and hiring a boat to use at the tournament could cost more than R18 000.

In order to help raise funds for the competition, Roberts' parents will host a "Dance Extravaganza" at the Zeekoevlei Yacht Club on Friday 22 June. Tickets to the event will cost R100 each and anyone interested in attending can contact Keith Klaassen on 078 901 2726. The World Championships will take place at Lake Iseo in Lombardy, Italy, from Monday 6 to Friday 10 August.